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ABSTRACT

The Internet may be the ultimate immersive and participatory medium, opening doors as it does to countless story worlds. As such, it has much to offer reading instruction in both elementary and secondary classrooms. This paper explores how a teacher used one web application--a text-based virtual environment called a MOO--to encourage his high school students to read "Brave New World" in an interactive and immersive way. The paper provides a reading model (The Three Dimensions of Response: Wilhelm's Reading Model) taken from Jeff Wilhelm's book, "You Gotta Be the Book: Teaching Engaged and Reflective Reading with Adolescents." It first explains the difference between a MOO and a MUD and then discusses in turn each dimension--Evocative, Connective, and Reflective. The paper concludes with more critical reflection in which three different students consider the same question. Cites 6 works. (NKA)

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A Brave New World: Synchronous Environments in the Literature Classroom.

by Robert Rozema

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Robert Rozema
Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, Michigan
http://homepages.wmich.edu/~r1rozema

NCTE
Atlanta, GA
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A Brave New World: Synchronous Environments in the Literature Classroom

Near the end of the *The Two Towers*, the second book in Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, Samwise asks his master, Frodo, "I wonder what sort of tale we've fallen into?" (407). Even those unfamiliar with the trilogy will recognize Sam's question as startlingly self-aware. Sam knows that he and Frodo are characters in a larger story that is still unfinished, and they have some power to shape the outcome of that story. They also realize that future readers of their tale will identify with its protagonists. "You and I," Frodo tells Sam, "are still stuck in the worst places of the story, and it is all too likely that some will say at this point: 'Shut the book now, dad; we don't want to read any more'" (409). As an English teacher, I want my student readers to see themselves as Frodo and Sam do: stuck in the middle of a tale. This can only happen if readers connect to the story in the way that Frodo imagines—if readers become so involved they cannot bear to read on when things look bad for the protagonist. Such readers live in what Tolkien labels a "secondary world which your mind can enter" (*Tree and Leaf* 60), actively participating in and shaping the story world rendered by the book.

Like Tolkien, Jeff Wilhelm believes that proficient readers enter a secondary world when they read. In *You Gotta Be the Book* (NCTE 1997), Wilhelm suggests that good readers engage texts on three different levels. The first of these Wilhelm labels the "evocative dimension," where readers enter the story world. Readers operating on this level show interest in the plot, identify with characters, and envision the story world. On the second and third levels, the "connective" and "reflective" dimensions in Wilhelm's terminology, good readers engage in more analytical activities, such as filling in extra-textual information and recognizing literary conventions. While sophisticated readers can operate on all three levels simultaneously, Wilhelm notes that less proficient readers "did not respond in connective or reflective ways to their reading unless they first overtly responded on all of the evocative dimensions" (88). These readers, in other words, must fall into the story world before they can think critically about it.

Technology can open a portal to this story world. As Janet Murray notes in *Hamlet on the Holodeck* (MIT 1997), computers give us new opportunities to live the story and shape its outcome: "The age-old desire to live out fantasy aroused by a fictional world," she writes, "has been intensified by a participatory, immersive medium that promises to satisfy it more completely than has ever before been possible" (98). The new medium Murray speaks of takes many forms, including video games, CD-Roms, and most significantly, the Internet and all of its applications. The Internet may be the ultimate immersive and participatory medium, opening doors as it does to countless story worlds. As such, it has much to offer reading instruction in both primary and secondary classrooms. This presentation explores how I used one web application—a text-based virtual environment called a MOO—to encourage my high school students to read *Brave New World* in an interactive and immersive way.

The Three Dimensions of Response: Wilhelm's Reading Model

The Evocative Dimension

- **Entering the story world**
- **Showing interest in the story action**
- **Relating to characters**
- **Seeing the story world**

"As they started to read, students would 'enter' or 'get into' the story world by comprehending literal meanings, taking an interest in the story action, and deciding to continue with the reading . . . The reader entering the story world also began to create rudimentary mental images, often stereotypes from television or films" (51).

The Connective Dimension

- **Elaborating on the story world**
- **Connecting literature to life**

" . . . a kind of transition between the moves students used to evoke and experience story worlds, and the moves used to step back and reflect on that experience. One set of moves was used to elaborate on and extend the story world beyond what was explicitly described in the text and to set up and explore alternatives to the written story. The second set of moves was used to explicitly connect personal experience to those of characters . . . (65)."

The Reflective Dimension

- **Considering significance**
- **Recognizing literary conventions**
- **Recognizing reading as a transaction**
- **Evaluating an author and the self as reader**

" . . . students seemed to have separated themselves from their participation in the story world and were looking at that experience in a more detached and objective manner. They seemed to be spectating on the reading experience and reflecting on it. Often this reflection would occur while they read, and it seemed to almost always occur after a reading" (74).

Wilhelm, Jeff. *You Gotta Be the Book: Teaching Engaged and Reflective Reading with Adolescents.* New York: Teachers College Press, 1997.

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The Literary MOO: A World of Words

What is a MOO?

MOO stands for Multi User Domain Object Oriented, but this explanation is not terribly helpful to the uninitiated. More simply, a MOO is a text-based virtual environment, a sort of sophisticated chat room complete with its own architecture of interconnected rooms, stockpile of manipulable objects, and cast of interesting characters. MOOS exist in cyberspace and can be accessed through a telnet connection or a web browser.

What is the difference between a MOO and a MUD?

The MOO is a sort of stepchild to the MUD (Multi User Dungeon), which was originally used for fantasy role-playing games and became popular on college campuses in the late 1980s and early 1990s. There are however, several notable differences between MOOS and MUDS. In a MUD, players have limited ability to shape the environment itself, this power resting in the hands of a few elite wizards. MUD participants must be content to achieve preordained goals like finding treasure, killing monsters, or solving puzzles. A MOO, on the other hand, typically has no agenda for its players. More importantly, MOO players have the ability to create, describe, and even program aspects of the MOO environment. As a result, MOO participants generally spend less time role-playing and more time creating things and socializing with each other in real time.

While the popularity of role-playing MUDS has declined, MOOS have made their way into academic settings, resulting in the creation of educational MOOS like LinguaMOO, an academic community for teaching and research hosted by the University of Texas at Dallas, and MediaMOO, a professional community for media researchers hosted by Georgia Tech University.

Where can I learn more about MOOS and MUDS?

There are literally thousands of MUDS and MOOS in existence on the web, as well as a wealth of information about them.

- For a good history of the MUD and some key terms, check out Jennifer Smith's MUD FAQ, located at http://www.cs.okstate.edu/%7Ejds/mudfaq-p1.html.
- www.mudconnect.com has an extensive compilation of both text-based and graphic-based MUDS.
- For a good discussion of the academic MOO, check out Walden Pond MOO at http://www.ualberta.ca/CNS/PUBS/hyperDispatch/hyperDispatch05/walden.htm.
- Rachel's Super MOO List, located at http://cinemaspace.berkeley.edu/%7Erachel/moolist/edu.html, features an informative list of educational MOOS.
- Janet Murray discusses MUDS and MOOS in her excellent book *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of the Narrative in Cyberspace* (MIT 1997), available online at http://web.mit.edu/jhmurray/www/HOH.html.
- Another great source is Howard Rheingold's *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier* (MIT 2000), which has a chapter devoted to MOOS and is also available online at http://www.rheingold.com/vc/book/5.html.
- Cynthia Haynes and Jan Rune Holmevik's *High Wired: On the Design, Use, and Theory of Educational MOOS* (U of M, 2000) is an outstanding collection of essays about MOOS, written by some of the most prominent figures in the field, including Amy Bruckman, Pavel Curtis, and Michael Joyce.

Entering the Brave New World: The Evocative Dimension

"The more persuasive the sensory representation of the digital space, the more we feel that we are present in the virtual world and the wider range of actions we will seek to perform there." Janet Murray, *Hamlet on the Holodeck* (125).

Making Evocative Moves: Entering and Seeing the Story World

----Coffee Shop----
You are in a coffee shop. There are several comfy chairs here, a few tattered couches, and a scattering of tables. On one of the tables, a few books rest. Among them is a copy of *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley. You may enter this book by typing "in." Otherwise, you may stay here to talk. Conversation topics to consider: Are you enjoying the MOO experience? What is rewarding or frustrating about it? Is it enriching the experience of reading *Brave New World*? Why or why not?
You see a coffee bar here.

----Main Lobby----
Welcome to the Brave New World MOO. You are in the main lobby of the London Center for Bladder and Conditioning. The room is large and industrial looking, with polished green marble floors and stark white walls. Sitting at a large metallic desk in the center of the room is a Beta-minus receptionist. There is also a large bulletin board on the east wall. Exits include an elevator to the west and a hallway to the east. To the south, you see an indoor bumble-puppy court.
You see a receptionist and a bulletin board here.

----Hallway----
The hallway is long and narrow, but exceedingly well lit. It leads east to a door labeled Fertilizing Room: Authorized Technicians Only and west to the Main Lobby.

----The Fertilizing Room----
The Fertilizing Room is an enormous room on the ground floor that faces north. It is cold, and a harsh thin light glares through the windows on the north wall. All around is the glass and nickel and bleakly shining porcelain of a laboratory. There are at least twenty-five workers here, all wearing white overalls, their hands gloved with a pale corpse-colored rubber. The light is frozen, dead, a ghost. Yellow microscopes line the tables. To the south, a door leads to the Bottling Room, and a hallway opens to the west.
You see workers and microscopes here.

----The Embryo Room----.
The darkness of the Embryo Room is visible and crimson, like the darkness of closed eyes on a summer's afternoon. The bulging flanks of row on receding row and tier above tier of bottles glint with innumerable rubies, and among the rubies move the dim red specters of men and women with purple eyes and all the symptoms of lupus. The hum and rattle of machinery faintly stir the air. There is an elevator to the west, and two sliding doors to the south.

More Evocative Moves: Experiencing the Story World

The Brave New World MOO was designed to simulate, as closely as possible, the setting of the novel. Accordingly, MOO participants could take virtual soma, experience caste prejudice, be subjected to subliminal psychological conditioning, and never spend time alone.

"I liked the role-playing and virtual reality aspect of it, just because it was fun to pretend and be imaginative."
--Leroux

"It was an interesting experience to role play as if I was in *Brave New World*."
--Iven

"It was fun to live the book!"
--Morgan

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Building the Brave New World: The Connective Dimension

"When we enter a fictional world, we do not merely 'suspend' a critical faculty; we also exercise a creative faculty. We do not suspend disbelief so much as we actively *create belief*." Janet Murray, *Hamlet on the Holodeck* (110).

"Reading on this dimension was extratextual, going beyond what was stated or even suggested by the book. The story world became, in effect, what could be called a 'reader's world.'" Jeff Wilhelm, *You Gotta Be the Book* (66).

Making Connective Moves: Elaborating on the Story World

Student characters

Iven Skinner (an Alpha)

Iven is a tall, handsome man who is head of the World State Island Management Program. He towers over you with his powerful presence and chiseled stature. As you gaze into his mysterious eyes, you see the incredible depth of his knowledge and wisdom.

Cecilia (a Beta)

A one-of-a-kind, non-Bokanovskified, mulberry-wearing Beta who works as a receptionist for the D.H.C and is glad she doesn't have to work as hard as an Alpha.

Wilhelmina Bowerman (a Delta)

An average Delta who revels in khaki. I even have khaki earrings. I make the waffle bottoms for Nike shoes designed specifically for centrifugal bumble puppy, but obstacle golf is really my favorite. Bokanovsky Group 874A.

Tito Hoover (a Delta)

A short man, but strong in stature. Born cousin of Benito Hoover, proud owner of his DDC card (Distinct Deltas Club). Tito prides himself in his khaki color clothes and his vast collection of soma bottles from all over the World State. Tito works hard at being the best Delta helicopter pusher and it shows. He's received seven awards for Best Helicopter Pusher in his union, the Delta Devils.

Student buildings

----Chapel to Our Ford----

You are in a fairly small, dimly lit, hexagon-shaped room. There is a circular table in the center with twelve chairs around it. At the head of the table is a small podium with glowing buttons on it, and a metal [illegible] is a console for playing synthetic music. In one corner of the room is a small, metallic refrigerator filled with bowls of soma-laced strawberry ice cream. In the center of the table is a large book of Fordism hymns. There is an exit to the lobby to the north. You see a book and refrigerator here.

----Social Gathering Room----

You are in a room where *Brave New World* citizens socialize. There is a soft glow of red light and a faint perfume of soma gas wafts around you. The purple carpet is plush and deep purple, your feet are soothed as you walk about. There are pneumatic couches scattered about and a dance floor serviced by a synthetic music plant. Around the north and east sides a balcony runs around the room. At the south end is a well-stocked bar. You may exit north to the balcony and west to the lobby. You see a dance floor, a pneumatic couch, and a synthetic music plant here.

----Balcony----

You are on the balcony of the Social Gathering Room taking a break from the dim soma-laced atmosphere inside. One story up, it is lined with a banister of brass surrogate. Plate glass windows separate you from indoors and around you lies the countryside. A helicopter passes over. You may exit south back to the Social Gathering Room. You see a soma dispenser and a lever here.

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Talking About *Brave New World*: The Reflective Dimension

"Hence arose into ever clearer view a question that had been haunting our work from the beginning: How could we exploit digital tools to augment critical reflection both on and within bookspace?" Jerome McGann, *Radiant Textuality* (214).

Making Reflective Moves: Considering Significance

The following transcript is an excerpt of a discussion that occurred within the Brave New World MOO. In this discussion, four students were asked to evaluate a statement made by Mustapha Mond, one of the ten controllers of the government in *Brave New World*. In his final conversation with Bernard Marx and John, two World State citizens who challenge the status quo, Mond claims that "truth's a menace. Science is a public danger" (227).

Leroux says, "I can see that truth is a menace, at least to the world state, because if they knew the truth (that they're conditioned, have no freedom, etc.) that would probably cause them to think independently, and a large amount of World State citizens thinking independently of the system would definitely be a menace."

Wilhelmina Bowerman says, "exactamundo!"

Tito Hoover says, "I don't understand"

Bambino says, "I wish I was like Leroux"

Leroux grins.

Wilhelmina Bowerman says, "and science is a public danger in the world state because science has the potential to harm people"

Leroux says, "basically, if the world state citizens knew the truth about them, they'd want to make change (revolt) and that's dangerous."

Bambino says, "but science DOES exist in the world state. I mean how do you think they created the system in the first place?"

Wilhelmina Bowerman says, "yes, but not like how we study chemistry, bio, and physics. Even the upper castes don't know that stuff"

Bambino says, "well the world leaders know science, just no one else"

Wilhelmina Bowerman says, "they use the chemicals in their jobs but don't know what they are"

Bambino says, "well some aspects of science"

Wilhelmina Bowerman [to Bambino] "right, just the high up guys"

Leroux says, "if the wrong people had access to science, they could make a soma antidote, or create individual, free-thinking people . . . they could disrupt the system"

Bambino says, "it might be like the US! All hell would break loose!"

Wilhelmina Bowerman says, "right, they don't want them to have the knowledge. They only know general things"

Bambino says, "I hope you realize I was sarcastic there"

Leroux says, "if the knowledge wasn't so restricted, there would be no world state!"

Wilhelmina Bowerman says, "the people are kept ignorant"

Tito Hoover says, "this whole thing makes me think of the matrix though . . . because towards the end they talk about how hard it will be to change other people because they are so part of the world that they couldn't believe, and . . ."

Bambino says, "this book is twisted!"

Wilhelmina Bowerman [to Tito Hoover] "what are you talking about?"

Leroux [to Tito Hoover] "I don't get your matrix connections . . ."

"I liked the discussions. I feel that the people in my group participated more freely in MOO discussions and had really good things to say that they probably wouldn't have voiced in class."

--Wilhelmina Bowerman

"I liked how it let me be 'masked' in a conversation and let me say opinions with less resistance, especially because [the teacher] wasn't right there to give me facial expressions or use a tone of voice to make me feel my opinion was wrong."

--Bambino

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More Criticaal Reflection: Another MOO Discussion

Three different students consider t the same question:

Iven Skinner says, "I would agree with h him that science is dangerous too"

Wilbur says, "Nah"

Wilbur says, "how is science dangerous?"

Stalin says, "think about the whole clonining idea"

Wilbur says, "Ok . . . think about the medicines"

Wilbur says, "The vaccines"

Iven Skinner says, "atom bomb"

Wilbur says, "Cures"

Wilbur says, "Cars"

Iven Skinner says, "nuclear waste"

Wilbur says, "Airplanes"

Wilbur says, "trains"

Wilbur says, "Computers"

Stalin says, "there are obvious benefits, but almost all have drawbacks too"

Iven Skinner says, "it does cause good, but it is still dangerous"

Wilbur says, "How is it dangerous?"

Stalin says, "all those things you just named have dangers to them too"

Wilbur says, "What is the danger in having cures for diseases, or colds . . . or whatever"

Wilbur leans on Stalin.

Stalin says, "you cure every disease and there would be nothing from stopping world population from exploding"

Wilbur says, "Sure there would"

Wilbur says, "Cars . . . trains . . ."

Wilbur chuckles.

Wilbur says, "And what is so bad about having so many people?"

Wilbur says, "I think that as people advance, they find new ways to do things"

Wilbur says, "Like a way to live on the moon or something"

Wilbur grins.

Stalin says, "also, vaccines work until the disease builds itself to battle the medicine, yet in the end your fighting makes it stronger"

Wilbur gazes up.

Wilbur says, "You could get rid of it"

Wilbur says, "And if it did get stronger, the medicines could too"

Wilbur shrugs.

Stalin says, "if that's possible, but think about AIDS"

Wilbur says, "Are you immune to tylenol or something?"

Stalin says, "been trying to cure that for years, with no luck whatsoever"

Wilbur nods.

Wilbur says, "Yep"

Stalin says, "who knows how long"

Wilbur says, "So... you think science is dangerous?"

Wilbur leans on Stalin.

Stalin says, "yeah"

Wilbur says, "So . . ."

Wilbur says, "Do you think that we should not engage in anything dangerous?"

Stalin says, "but I don't disagree that there are multiple very good benefits to it too"

Wilbur says, "Hold on . . . a second . . . you think we shouldn't research, or get involved in science?"

Stalin says, "I mean we wouldn't be talking over a computer if we didn't take those risks"

Wilbur laughs.

"I liked the small group conversations with two or three other people. It allowed people not to be afraid of saying something."

--Wilbur

"I felt the discussions were rather useful . . ."

--Iven Skinner

"I could speak out better than in class discussions"

--Red

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The Brave New World MOO is located at http://homepages.wmich.edu/~r1rozema/Fun

English Ed. on the Web, my site dedicated to technology and teaching English, is located at http://www.englishedweb.net. The site is still under development.

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